

# THE GUIDED LIGHT

LA CROSSE COUNTY'S DEMENTIA NEWSLETTER  
FOR HOPE, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES

## "Grief and Ambiguous Loss"

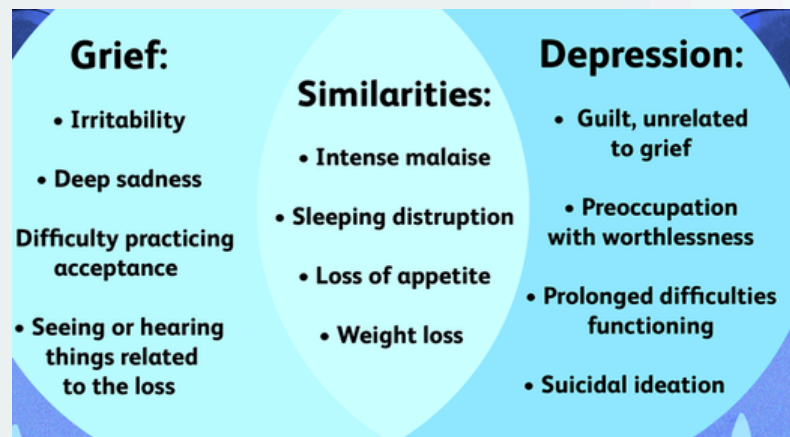


Grief is the acute pain that accompanies loss. Because it is a reflection of what we love, it can feel all-encompassing. Grief is not limited to the loss of people, but when it follows the loss of a loved one, it may be compounded by feelings of guilt and confusion, especially if the relationship was a difficult one. Some forms of grief and loss do not provide a clear resolution and can appear as unresolved grief. This may cause grief to impact us more profoundly and lead to feelings of anger, regret or misunderstanding.

### The Process of Grief

Because grief obeys its own trajectory, there is no timetable for feelings of pain after loss; nor is it possible to avoid it altogether. In fact, attempts to suppress or deny grief are just as likely to prolong the process, while also demanding additional emotional effort.

Similarly, the misperception that "more" grief is better or that there is a proper way to grieve can make the process more difficult.



For some people, grief is a short-term phenomenon, also known as acute grief, although the pain may return unexpectedly at a later time. But other individuals may experience prolonged grief, lasting months or years. Without help and support, such grief can lead to isolation and chronic loneliness and even Depression.

This month's edition we will discuss grief, ambiguous loss, ways to cope, when to reach out for help and highlight resources.

### Did you know...

- **Nearly 1 in 5 Americans serve as an unpaid caregiver**
- **2 in 5 caregivers consider their roles to be highly stressful**
- **17% of caregivers describe their health as fair or poor**

*These numbers demonstrate why it's vital to take care of caregivers, too!*

# Ambiguous Loss

“Ambiguous loss” is a sense of loss and sadness that is not associated with a death of a loved one. It can be a loss of emotional connection when a person's physical presence remains, or when that emotional connection remains but a physical connection is lost. Often, there isn't a sense of closure. Ambiguous loss can feel lonely, stressful and confusing. Your feelings need to be validated and the significance of the experience recognized. However, there's often no formal recognition from others that a loss has occurred — or if others do acknowledge it, they show no recognition that it is of any major significance. You may have intense sorrow, numbness, bitterness, persistent longing, pain, rumination, guilt and anger. Dr. Pauline Boss coined the term nearly 40 years ago and created two categories for better understanding.



Type-one ambiguous loss is “physical absence with psychological presence,” a type of ambiguous loss that occurs when someone you love is physically absent under unknown, uncertain or unresolved circumstances. Examples include loss as a result of: Unexplained disappearances, war and acts of terrorism, natural disasters. Can also come from a loss of contact, even if you know where the person is or what has happened to them. This kind of ambiguous loss includes circumstances like: divorce, adoption, estrangement, or incarceration.

Type-two ambiguous loss refers to a psychological loss, including a mental or emotional disappearance (like when someone’s personality has changed so much that they no longer seem like the person you once knew). It can be described as “psychological

## **Ambiguous Grief Symptoms...**



- Feeling numb
- Persistent sadness
- Feelings of isolation
- Guilt or regret
- Denial
- Anger or irritability
- Preoccupation with the death

absence with physical presence.” Your loved one is physically present, but they’ve changed, whether emotionally or cognitively (or both). Some examples include changes caused by: Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia, traumatic brain injury, drug and/or alcohol addictions, depression or other chronic mental illness.

## Coping with Grief & Loss

**Let your feelings out.** It is important to allow yourself to feel, be patient with yourself and be open to accepting the throws of emotions. You can expect the intensity of your grief to vary throughout. Speaking with people in your support system is a good way to cope with your feelings. Be sure to find activities that nurture your own self-care, hobbies or journaling. Physical activity, calming activities. What fuels you? What feels good? Do more of that.

**Create your own closure.** Create closure by doing something special to honor what is lost. This can be done by an event/celebration/honoring, writing about memories and reflecting, or by creating a way to honor the person, the journey or both.

**Letting others know what you need... or don't.** It's ok to not be ok. It's OK if you don't know how to do this. No one does. Letting people know how they are helping or hindering your grief, what to say or not say, what you want them to know or what they can do for you is important. If you feel angry or misunderstood at times, it may be time to speak up to those around you with what you need (or don't need).

**Resources** **You are not alone.** Local resource highlights to check out:

- La Crosse Parks & Rec. Coping with Grief, 2nd Wednesdays; 10:00am-11:30am at South Side Neighborhood Center 608-789-8298
- Franciscan Spirituality Center's Listening Together: A Monthly Grief Support Group 2nd Monday Monthly 5:30-6:30pm. Call 608-791-5295
- Aging & Disability Resource Center's Dementia Caregiver Grief Therapy Group. Held weekly, twice a year. Call for upcoming schedule: 608-785-5700.
- GriefShare [www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)
- St. Croix Hospice
  - Support Groups [www.eventbrite.com/cc/st-croix-hospice-grief-support-1149799](http://www.eventbrite.com/cc/st-croix-hospice-grief-support-1149799)
  - Facebook Group [facebook.com/groups/familycaregiverssupport](https://facebook.com/groups/familycaregiverssupport)
- Moments Hospice [momentshospice.com/finding-support-and-community/](http://momentshospice.com/finding-support-and-community/)
- Gundersen Health System:
  - Drop-in Grief Support 1st & 3rd Saturdays/monthly 1-2:30pm. Call (608) 775-3620.
  - Grief Education Support. Five-week sessions (Spring&Fall) 2-3:30pm. Call (608) 775-3620.

Other resources to consider: professional counselors, funeral homes, faith communities, online.

## When to Seek Professional Help

No one can predict how grief will affect them. It may be time to seek help if grief is interfering with your daily life or processing emotions. There are times when you may need professional counseling or therapy. Signs may include:

- Excessive alcohol or drug use
- Feelings of sadness you cannot shake
- Inability to sleep or function in daily life (not fulfilling responsibilities)
- Reckless behaviors and unnecessary risk-taking



*If you have suicidal thoughts, seek immediate care. Call or Text the Suicide Crisis Lifeline at 988*



## UPCOMING CLASSES & EVENTS

### July - August - September 2024

- Learn & Connect – Cognitive & Memory Loss Education for new diagnosis, early-stage caregiving. **Wednesdays Sept. 4th- 25th, 2:30\*-4:00pm** at GHS East Building, 3rd Floor Neurology. Register per date: 608-785-5700
- Alzheimer's Association Walk-Sat. Sept. 21, 8:30am Riverside Park La Crosse. Opening 9:40am. Walk 10am. Contact: CJ 414-296-5102
- Dementia Live - September 26, 9-10am OR 12:30-1:30pm Holmen Area Community Centr, Register by calling 608-785-5700 or online <https://tinyurl.com/y547njkp>
- Savvy Caregiver Education Thursdays Oct. 3-Nov. 7, 10:30am-Noon at LOCATION. Register 608-785-5700

*Caring Better & Braver*

A day of education & support for family caregivers

**SATURDAY, OCT 26, 2024**  
**10AM-4PM**  
 Holmen Area Community Center

Registration Begins August 15, 2024

Don't miss this valuable opportunity to gain knowledge, resources, and a renewed sense of purpose in your caregiving journey!



**FOR MORE LOCAL ONGOING dementia friendly resources, social activities, caregiver support groups, and more...  
 Stop by or Call ADRC 608-785-5700**

- State-wide Conference
- Free Admission. Donations welcome.
- Free On-site Respite
- Intended for: individuals with dementia, mild cognitive impairment (MCI), caregivers, community members, program/group leaders, professionals, and more.
- Keynote Speakers: Dr. Natali Edmonds, board certified Geropsychologist, founder of Dementia Careblazers and Sheri Fairman, founder of Dementia Care Solutions.
- Two Breakouts - four presentation options
- Lunch with a panel discussion with people living with MCI and dementia
- Registration: <https://www.co.dodge.wi.gov/registration>

### Bringing Hope & Light to the Dementia Journey

A full day conference hosted by Dementia Care Specialists (DCS) and partners across Wisconsin. Designed to empower the community, those living with dementia and their family/caregivers with the tools and supports to provide meaning and purpose. Multiple sessions are designed, led by and for people living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or dementia.

Free Admission. Donations are welcome.  
 Inquire about Free Onsite Respite

Keynote Speakers:  
 Dr. Natali Edmonds  
 Sheri Fairman

Two Panels: Caregivers  
 People Living with MCI and Dementia

Have Fun, Engage, Increase Quality of Life, and Connect with Others

Learn from Experts, Gain Skills, Tools, Build Your Network, and Gain More Understanding

Exhibitors with Services and Supports From Across Wisconsin

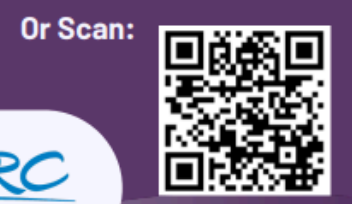
**Tuesday, August 6, 2024**

8:00am - 4:00pm  
 UW-Stevens Point



For Questions Call:  
**920-386-3580**

Register at:  
<https://www.co.dodge.wi.gov/registration>



Disclaimer: The ADRC is unbiased and does not endorse any organization, product or service.



Sign up for a copy of this newsletter: 608-785-5700